SPECIFICATION

TITLE OF THE INVENTION

Electronic legal research ordering and pricing system and method of defining and valuing electronic legal research instructions and electronically ordering and pricing legal research.

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CROSS-REFERENCE TO PROVISIONAL APPLICATION

This Non-Provisional Application for Patent claims the benefit of a Provisional Application for Patent filed on or about March 14, 2001, of the same Title and by the same Inventor as set forth above. Despite inquiry to, and due to backlogs at, the USPTO, the application number of said Provisional Application for Patent has not yet been provided to the Inventor for inclusion here.

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STATEMENT REGARDING FEDERALLY SPONSORED RESEARCH

This invention was not made by an agency of the United States Government or under contract with an agency of the United States Government.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

1. Field Of The Invention

The invention relates generally to an electronic system and method for accessing and providing legal research services, and more particularly to an electronic system and method for virtual ordering of legal research on a network using legal research instructions and value/price calculations defined by the method.

2. Description Of The Related Art

Most lawyers must obtain legal research during the representation of their clients, often under very tight deadlines. Traditionally, legal research has been performed by junior lawyers, law clerks and paraprofessionals employed within a law firm or similar organization. Legal research assignments are usually given in time-consuming, face-to-face meetings or in memoranda where the legal issue to be researched and non-specific legal research instructions are discussed. This traditional way of obtaining legal research is often inefficient in that (a) confusion and misunderstandings result because the legal researcher is not given standardized legal research instructions and specifications, and (b) the legal research must be performed internally, at the expense of other important activities of a law practice and at the cost of recruiting, employing and supervising researchers (attorneys or paraprofessionals) even though legal research needs vary over time.

Recently, independent legal research providers external to law firms and similar organizations have begun to offer legal research services on an outsourcing basis. Although these providers may often be contacted through Internet web sites, lawyers and others desiring to purchase legal research from them cannot do so in an automated fashion utilizing the Internet or any other automated system. Lawyers and other purchasers must still hold time-consuming meetings and/or telephone conversations with these providers to discuss the legal issue to be researched and the research parameters, again creating confusion and misunderstandings because standardized and specific legal research instructions and specifications are not given. Additionally, lawyers and other purchasers must engage in time-consuming negotiations with these providers over the terms of the engagement and develop and execute purchase or service agreements. Because each legal research project is sui generis, and the amount of time to complete a legal research project is difficult to predict, most independent legal research providers insist on being paid on an open-ended hourly basis, creating a risk of cost overruns for purchasers and making the service less attractive.

What is desired, therefore, is a system and method for automating the ordering, pricing and provision of legal research that systematizes and standardizes complex legal research instructions and specifications and calculates prices for each customized legal research project, allowing lawyers and other purchasers of legal research to purchase legal research quickly and efficiently at fixed prices quoted in advance. Also desired is an automated system that allows legal research providers to define legal research instructions and specifications and the value/price parameters they will accept, and that allows for the automated settlement of transactions, for example by credit card.

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BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

Therefore, an object of the invention is to provide an electronic system, device and method for automating the ordering, pricing, purchasing and provision of legal research.

Another object of the invention is to provide a device and method for defining, systematizing and standardizing legal research instructions and specifications.

Another object of the invention is to provide a device and method for defining, systematizing, standardizing and calculating fixed prices for customized legal research projects.

These and other objects of the invention are achieved by creation of an electronic legal research ordering and pricing device and system, and a method of defining electronic legal research instructions and values and ordering and calculating prices of electronic legal research orders. The device and system include a network composed of a legal research purchaser's computer, a legal research provider's computer, a settlement organization's computer, an electronic legal research ordering and pricing sever, and connections between these elements (e.g., the Internet).

The electronic legal research ordering and pricing server component of the invention includes the following elements: a legal research instruction and specification options database, a legal research instruction and specification values database, a legal research pricing database, a legal research delivery options and pricing database, a display information section, an order reception and price calculation section, a basket database, a settlement processing section, a final order processing section, an orders database, a parameter definition section, and a file search section.

The invention also comprises a method of defining electronic legal research instruction and specification options and pricing values. In one mode, this is accomplished first by establishing and storing in a database essential primary and secondary categories of legal research instructions and specifications that organize and manage specific legal research instructions and specifications and pricing values. Second, specific legal research instructions and specifications are established and stored. Third, pricing values for each category, sub-category and legal research instruction and specification are assigned and stored in a legal research instruction and specification values database.

The invention also comprises a method of calculating customized legal research prices based upon the legal research instructions and specifications selected by a purchaser. In one mode, this is accomplished by first establishing and storing price ranges that correspond to the pricing values assigned and stored in the legal research instruction and specification values database. Second, the pricing values of the specific legal research instructions and specifications selected by a purchaser for a particular order are compared with the price ranges corresponding to said values, and an interim price is generated. Third, this interim price is adjusted by the price of delivery options and means defined by the legal research provider and selected by the purchaser to arrive at a final price.

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BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1   shows one specific embodiment of an electronic legal research ordering and pricing system in accordance with the invention.

FIG. 2 is a flowchart describing a method of defining electronic legal research instruction and specification options and assigning pricing values, according to one specific embodiment of the present invention.

FIG. 3 is a flowchart of processing steps executed when legal research orders are placed electronically and prices are calculated electronically.

FIG. 4 is a flowchart of processing steps executed to calculate the price of a legal research order.

FIG. 5 is a flowchart of processing steps when a user or purchaser proceeds to place a legal research order.

FIG. 6 is a screen layout of the "Type of Analysis" primary category and related sub-categories and instructions and specifications.

FIG. 7 (2 pages) is a screen layout of the "Controlling Law" primary category and related sub-categories and instructions and specifications.

FIG. 8 (2 pages) is a screen layout of the "Forum" primary category and related sub-categories and instructions and specifications.

FIG. 9 (3 pages) is a screen layout of the "Sources of Law" primary category and related sub-categories and instructions and specifications.

FIG. 10 is a screen layout of the "Subject Matter" primary category and related sub-categories and instructions and specifications.

FIG. 11 is a screen layout of the "Type of Research" primary category and related sub-categories and instructions and specifications.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

FIG. 1 is a drawing showing the configuration of an electronic legal research ordering and pricing system according to an embodiment of the present invention.

As shown in FIG. 1, the electronic legal research ordering and pricing system comprises a purchaser client 1, an electronic legal research ordering and pricing server 2, a legal research provider 3, and a settlement organization 4 (e.g. a credit card provider or bank), which are interconnected with each other through a network. The present embodiment will be described on the assumption that the network connecting a purchaser client 1, an electronic legal research ordering and pricing server 2, a legal research provider 3, and a settlement organization 4, is the Internet, although any suitable interface including voice telephone communication and the postal service is contemplated within the scope of the invention.

According to the present embodiment, a purchaser client 1 is a terminal (e.g., a personal computer or other Internet access device) used by a purchaser to order and purchase legal research. A purchaser client 1 has an input/output device such as a keyboard or a mouse and an output device such as a CRT screen 5. A purchaser client 1 may have an Internet browser 6 serving as the interface with an electronic legal research ordering and pricing server 2, although any suitable interface is contemplated within the scope of the invention.

An electronic legal research ordering and pricing server 2, receives, stores, processes and displays legal research ordering, pricing and processing information, and includes a legal research instruction and specification options database 7, a legal research instruction and specification values database 8, a legal research pricing database 9, a legal research delivery options and pricing database 10, a display information section 11, an order reception and price calculation section 12, a basket database 13, a settlement processing section 14, a final order processing section 15, an orders database 16, a parameter definition section 17, and a file search section 19.

A legal research provider 3, defines essential legal research instruction and specification options that can be followed by the legal research provider and selected by a purchaser client 1, by using a parameter definition section 17, through an input/output device 18, such as a computer. This data can include the type of legal research to be performed (e.g., case law, statutory, regulatory research), specification of the law controlling the legal issue under consideration (e.g., federal or state constitutions, statutes, regulations or common law), the forum in which the case is being heard (e.g., federal or state courts, agencies or other tribunals), the sources of law to be researched (e.g., federal or state constitutions, statutes, regulations, common law, judicial rules, law reviews and treatises), the subject matter of the issue to be researched (e.g., procedural questions or areas of substantive law such as civil rights, criminal, contracts and torts), the type of research (online or law library), and whether the research is related to prior or contemporaneous legal research orders. Data defined here are transferred to the legal research ordering and pricing server 2, and stored in a legal research instructions and specifications database 7.

For each legal research instruction and specification option included in the legal research instructions and specifications database 7, a legal research provider 3, assigns a value by using a parameter definition section 17, through an input/output device 18, such as a computer. In this embodiment, the pricing values assigned by a legal research provider 3, are numerals related to and based upon the complexity of and time needed to perform each legal research instruction and specification, although other means of designating and determining the value of legal research instructions and specifications (e.g., equations and/or algorithms) are contemplated within the scope of the invention. Data defined here are transferred to the legal research ordering and pricing server 2, and stored in a legal research instruction and specification values database 8.

Using a parameter definition section 17 through an input/output device 18, such as a computer, a legal research provider 3, defines the price ranges for legal research it will provide in relation to the total value score for any legal research project ordered, which is the summation of all values assigned by the legal research provider 3, to the specific legal research instruction and specification options selected by a purchaser client 1. Data defined here are transferred to the legal research ordering and pricing server 2, and stored in a legal research pricing database 9.

A legal research provider 3, defines the delivery time and means options that can be met by the legal research provider and selected by a purchaser client 1, by using a parameter definition section 17, through an input/output device 18, such as a computer. For each delivery time and means option defined by the legal research provider 3, the legal research provider 3, assigns a price adjustment for legal research to be delivered within the specified time and by the specified means. Data defined here are transferred to the legal research ordering and pricing server 2, and stored in a legal research delivery options and pricing database 10.

A display information section 11, serves as a World Wide Web (WWW) page generator, producing for a purchaser client 1, display information including legal research instruction and specification options, delivery time and means options, pages where the legal issue to be researched and facts related to the issue can be stated, order and price summary information with options to modify or delete orders, customer information (e.g., name and address), terms and conditions information, settlement information and final order confirmation and processing information. The display information section 11, obtains the information for display by means of a file search section 19, which searches through the databases in the electronic legal research ordering and pricing server for the appropriate information to construct WWW pages and/or pre-designed WWW pages stored in a WWW pages database 20.

One or more Internet servers/CGIs (Common Gateway Interfaces) 21, serve as an interface between a purchaser client 1 and an electronic legal research ordering and pricing server 2. The Internet servers/CGIs receive display/request/input information from a purchaser client 1, which they transfer to an electronic legal research ordering and pricing server 2. The Internet servers/CGIs also receive display/request/output data from an electronic legal research ordering and pricing server 2, which they transfer to a purchaser client 1.

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An order reception and price calculation section 12, receives from a purchaser client 1 (via, e.g., an Internet server/CGI) and stores in a basket database 13, for each legal research project ordered, all selected legal research instruction and specification options, all selected delivery time and means options, the legal issue to be researched, facts related to the issue (optional), and customer information (e.g., name and address).

For each legal research project ordered, the order reception and price calculation section 12, utilizing the file search section 19, searches through the legal research instruction and specification value database 8, for the value assigned by a legal research provider 3, to each legal research instruction and specification option selected by a purchaser client 1. The order reception and price calculation section 12, calculates the total value for the legal research project and stores it in a calculation database 22.

For each legal research project ordered, the order reception and price calculation section 12, utilizing the file search section 19, next searches through the legal research pricing database 9, for the price range assigned by a legal research provider 3, to the total value calculated for the legal research project. This becomes the interim price for each legal research project ordered by the purchaser client 1, and is stored in the calculation database 22.

For each legal research project ordered, the order reception and price calculation section 12, utilizing the file search section 19, next searches the legal research delivery options and pricing database 10, for the price adjustment assigned by a legal research provider 3, to each legal research delivery means and specification option selected by a purchaser client 1. The order reception and price calculation section 11, determines the final price for each legal research project ordered by a purchaser client 1, by adjusting the interim price stored in the calculation database 22, to reflect all delivery means and specification option price adjustments. The final price for each legal research project ordered by the purchaser client 1, is stored in the basket database 13, along with the other information received by the purchaser client 1, for each legal research project ordered.

A display information section 11, displays to the purchaser client 1, a summary of each legal research project ordered, its final price, and a total final price for all legal research projects ordered (if more than one). This displayed information can include a summary of all selected legal research instruction and specification options, a summary of all selected delivery time and means options, and the legal issue to be researched and facts (optional) related to the issue. The display information section 11, obtains this information from the basket database 13, through the file search section 19.

A settlement processing section 14, receives from the file search section 19, the total final price for all legal research projects ordered, and receives from a purchaser client 1, information necessary to provide payment for the legal research projects ordered (e.g., account information). Based upon this information, the settlement processing section 14, requests a settlement organization 4 (or a legal research provider 3, in cases of accounts maintained by a legal research provider 3), to authorize execution of a settlement. An Internet Server/CGI 21, may serve as the interface between the settlement organization 14 (and/or legal research provider 3), and the electronic legal research ordering and pricing server 2. When the settlement processing section 14, receives authorization of the ability to

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complete the settlement from the settlement organization 4, and/or legal research provider 3, it transfers this information to a display information section 11, which displays it to a purchaser client 1.

A final order processing section 15, receives from a purchaser client 1, confirmation of submission of the order. Upon receipt of this information, the final order processing section 15, submits the order to the settlement organization 4, for final settlement, and receives final settlement notification. The final order processing section 15, also obtains from the file search section 19, all information related to the order, including a summary of all selected legal research instruction and specification options, a summary of all selected delivery time and means options, the legal issue to be researched and facts (optional) related to the issue, the final price for each legal research project ordered, and the total final price for all legal research projects ordered. The final order processing section 15, stores all order data and settlement data in an orders database 16, and notifies the legal research provider 3 that an order has been received and/or transfers this information directly to the legal research provider 3, through the Internet Server/CGI for further handling.

The electronic legal research ordering and pricing server 2, can be comprised of an information processing apparatus such as a personal computer or computer server. All of the above-described databases may be stored in a storage device such as a magnetic disk or optical disk included within or available to this information processing apparatus. All of the above-described processing sections are preferably executed by a software program stored in or available to this information processing apparatus.

FIG. 2 outlines a method of defining electronic legal research instruction and specification options and assigning pricing values, according to an embodiment of the present invention.

First, the essential primary legal research instruction and specification option categories must be defined by the legal research provider 3 (Step 200). In this step, the parameter definition section 17, displays information through an input/output device 18, on existing primary instruction and specification option categories maintained in the legal research instructions and specifications options database 7. The legal research provider 3, selects a desired primary category if it exists among the displayed categories. If a desired category does not exist, a new primary category can be created by the legal research provider 3, by using the input/output device 18. Alternatively, existing primary categories may be deleted in the same way. Primary legal research instruction and specification categories are used by the legal research provider 3, to organize and manage specific legal research instructions and specifications and pricing values. For example, the following primary categories would be defined under an embodiment of the invention:

    A. Type of Analysis (e.g., case law, statutory, regulatory, judicial rules)

    B. Controlling Law (the law(s) that control the issue to be researched)

    C. Forum (the tribunal hearing the case related to the issue to be researched)

D. Sources of Law (the specific sources of law to be researched)

E. Subject Matter (the subject of the legal issue to be researched, e.g., substantive/procedural)

F. Type of Research (e.g., on line or law library)

When a primary legal research instruction and specification category option is defined, it is stored by the parameter definition section 17, in the legal research instructions and specifications options database 7 (Step 201).

The definition of primary legal research instruction and specification categories is followed by the definition of essential legal research instruction and specification sub-categories within each primary category (Step 202). In this step, the parameter definition section 17, displays information through an input/output device 18, on any existing instruction and specification sub-categories maintained in the instructions and specifications database 7. The legal research provider 3, selects a desired sub-category if it exists among the displayed categories. If a desired sub-category does not exist, a new sub-category can be created using the input/output device 18. Alternatively, existing sub-categories may also be deleted in the same way. Legal research instruction and specification sub-categories are used by the legal research provider 3 and the purchaser client 1, to further organize and manage the specific legal research instructions and specifications and pricing values.

When a legal research instruction and specification sub-category is defined, it is stored by the parameter definition section 17, in the legal research instructions and specifications options database 7 (Step 201).

The definition of legal research instruction and specification sub-categories is followed by the definition of further sub-categories/specific legal research instruction and specification options (Step 203). In this step, the parameter definition section 17, displays information through an input/output device 18, on any existing additional sub-categories/instructions and specifications maintained in the instructions and specifications database 7. The legal research provider 3, selects desired sub-categories/instructions and specifications if they exist. If a desired sub-category/instruction or specification does not exist, a new sub-category/instruction or specification can be created using the input/output device 18. Alternatively, existing sub-categories/instructions and specifications may be deleted in the same way.

FIG. 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 and 11 show screen layouts of primary legal research instruction and specification option categories, sub-categories and further sub-categories/instructions and specifications under the preferred embodiment of the invention. These instructions and specifications are defined by the legal research provider through the parameter definition section 17, and, when the system is operational as described below, displayed to a purchaser client 1, as options for selection during the ordering and purchasing process. Also displayed to a purchaser client 1, but not shown on these screen layouts, are "selection buttons" beside each instruction and specification and that allow selections to be made, a "clear form" button to erase selections, and a "submit" button allowing selections to be transmitted by the purchaser client 1, back to the electronic legal research ordering and pricing server 2.

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For each sub-category/specific legal research instruction and specification defined by the legal research provider 3, according to the above-described process, the parameter definition section 17, requests that the legal research provider 3, through the input/output device 18, specify whether the defined sub-category/instruction and specification is either (a) a categorical guide only, to be displayed to a purchaser client 1, for which a pricing value will not be defined, or (b) an option that can be selected by a purchaser client 1 while ordering legal research, for which a pricing value is to be defined (Step 204). The parameter definition section 17, also provides the legal research provider 3, with the ability to create for each defined legal research instruction and specification an additional information area or "box" within which a purchaser client 1, can provide additional information about a selected legal research instruction or specification, such as the specific name of an administrative agency or source of law to be researched (Step 205).

If the legal research provider 3, specifies that a defined sub-category/instruction or specification is a categorical guide only, the parameter definition section 17, asks whether an additional information area is needed (Step 205), creates this area if requested (Step 207), stores the information in the legal research instructions and specifications options database 7 (Step 201) and moves on to ask for the next sub-category or legal research instruction and specification (Step 209).

If the legal research provider 3, specifies that a defined sub-category or legal research instruction or specification is an option that can be selected by a purchaser client 1, while ordering legal research, the parameter definition section 17, requests that the legal research provider 3, define the pricing value for the sub-category/legal research instruction or specification (Step 206). According to the present embodiment of the invention, the legal research provider 3, using an input/output device 18, inputs a positive or negative number representing the value of the sub-category/legal research instruction or specification, based upon an assessment by the legal research provider 3, of the complexity of and time needed to perform each legal research instruction and specification. For example, a legal research provider 3, may assign one legal research instruction or specification with a value of +10 (meaning high complexity and time to complete), another legal research instruction or specification a value of 0 (meaning average complexity and time to complete) and another legal research instruction or specification with a value of -10 (meaning low complexity and time to complete). The parameter definition section 17, then asks whether an additional information area is needed (Step 205) and creates this area if requested (Step 206). The parameter definition section 17, then stores the sub-category/legal research instruction or specification in the legal research instructions and specifications options database 7 (Step 201), and stores the defined value in the legal research instruction and specification values database 8 (Step 208), and moves on to ask for the next sub-category or legal research instruction and specification (Step 209).

FIG. 3 outlines a flow of processing steps when legal research orders are placed electronically and prices are calculated electronically.

A user or purchaser desiring to order legal research inputs a URL address (uniform resource locator) through the purchaser client 1, as a request screen page, for the location on the WWW at which the

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electronic legal research ordering and pricing server 2, can be accessed (e.g., the web site of a legal research provider 3, or a web site that provides legal research order reception and processing to multiple legal research providers). An Internet server/CGI 21, to which the purchaser client 1 has a connection, locates the URL, itself an Internet server/CGI 21, with which the electronic legal research ordering and pricing server 2, has a connection. This process is similar to electronic commerce systems generally, and a detailed description is not provided (Step 301).

The URL/Internet server/CGI 21, receives the display request page information and activates the display information section 11, of the electronic legal research ordering and pricing server 2, which analyzes the request and utilizes the file search section 19, to locate and display responsive web page information from the WWW pages database 20, such as the home page for the web site (Step 302). Additional information may be requested by the user or purchaser and displayed in the same manner.

When the user or purchaser decides to purchase legal research, information including purchaser client identification (client ID) and a request to place an order is transferred from the client purchaser 1, as display request page information, and the URL/Internet server/CGI 21, activates the order reception and price calculation section 12, which establishes a new "basket" or file in the basket database 13, for the user or purchaser (Step 302). The order reception and price calculation section 12, then activates the display information section 11, which, utilizing the file search section 19, searches the legal research instructions and specifications options database 7, and the WWW pages database 20, to create and display the first primary category of legal research instruction and specification options and appropriate sub-categories (Step 304). FIG. 6 shows a screen layout of this display (omitting the "selection", "clear form" and "submit" buttons as described above) under the preferred embodiment of the invention.

Utilizing the purchaser client 1, the user or purchaser selects and inputs the legal research instruction and specification options desired from the displayed category and sub-categories and submits these as request screen information. The order reception and price calculation section 12, receives the selected legal research instructions and specifications and stores them in the basket database 13, then activates the display information section 11, to display the next category and sub-categories of legal research instruction and specification options (Step 305). Step 304 and Step 305 are repeated for each primary category of legal research instruction and specification options and all sub-categories (Step 306). FIG. 7, 8, 9, 10 and 11 show screen layouts of the next category and sub-category displays (omitting the "selection", "clear form" and "submit" buttons as described above) under the preferred embodiment of the invention.

When all legal research instruction and specification options have been selected, input and stored in the basket database 13, the display information section 11, utilizing the file search section 19, searches the legal research delivery options and pricing database 10, and the WWW pages database 20, and creates and displays a screen with the legal research delivery means and specification options (Step 307). Utilizing the purchaser client 1, the user or purchaser selects and inputs the delivery options desired as request screen information. The order reception and price calculation section 12, receives the selected

delivery options and stores them in the basket database 13, then activates the display information section 11, to display the legal issue input screen (Step 308).

Utilizing the file search section 19, the display information section 11, searches the WWW pages database 20, and creates and displays a legal research issue input screen, which provides space for the user or purchaser to input the legal issue to be researched pursuant to the instructions and specifications previously given (Step 309). Utilizing the purchaser client 1, the user or purchaser selects and inputs the delivery options desired as request screen information. The order reception and price calculation section 12, receives the legal issue input and stores it in the basket database 13, then calculates the price for the legal research order (Step 310).

The flow of processing steps executed to calculate the price of a legal research order is shown as FIG. 4. First, the order reception and price calculation section 12, utilizing the file search section 19, searches through the legal research instruction and specification value database 8, for the value assigned by a legal research provider 3, to each legal research instruction and specification option selected by the purchaser client 1 that is stored in the basket database 13 (Step 401). The order reception and price calculation section 12, stores each value in the calculation database 22, and then calculates the total value for the legal research project and stores it in the calculation database 22 (Step 402).

Next, the order reception and price calculation section 12, utilizing the file search section 19, searches through the legal research pricing database 9, for the price range assigned by a legal research provider 3, to the total value calculated for the legal research project (Step 403). For example, the price for legal research projects having a value range between 30 and 35 might be $600, but only $300 for legal research projects having a value range between 15 and 20. This price becomes the interim price for each legal research project ordered by the purchaser client 1, and is stored in the calculation database 22.

Next, the order reception and price calculation section 12, utilizing the file search section 19, searches the legal research delivery options and pricing database 10, for the price adjustments assigned by a legal research provider 3, to each legal research delivery means and specification option selected by a purchaser client 1 (Step 404). The order reception and price calculation section 11, calculates the final price for each legal research project ordered by a purchaser client 1, by adjusting the interim price stored in the calculation database 22, to reflect all delivery means and specification option price adjustments (Step 405). For example, for delivery within 24 hours, the interim price might be multiplied by 2.0, whereas for delivery within 7 days the interim price might be multiplied by 1.2. The final price for each legal research project ordered by the purchaser client 1, is stored in the basket database 13, along with the other information received by the purchaser client 1, for each legal research project ordered (Step 405). Other price adjustments may be made by utilizing the same process (e.g., reducing the price of follow-up research related to a prior legal research order).

When the final price is calculated, the order reception and price calculation section 12, activates the display information section 11, which, utilizing the file search section 19, searches the basket database

13 and the WWW pages database 20, to create and display to the purchaser client 1, a summary of the legal research ordered, including the legal research instructions and specifications selected, the legal research issue stated, the delivery options and means specified and the price (Step 406). The user or purchaser is prompted on this summary screen to indicate whether (a) modifications to the order are desired; (b) additional legal research orders are desired; or (c) the user or purchaser wishes to proceed to place the order (Step 407).

If the user or purchaser inputs, through the purchaser client 1, that modifications are desired, Step 304 through Step 310 are repeated, with the exception that the display information section 11, also searches the basket database 13, and displays the legal research instructions and specifications and delivery means and specifications previously selected (Step 408). The user or purchaser, utilizing the purchaser client 1, is given the option at each step to change previously selected options or to leave them the same. When all options have been selected and stored in the basket database 13 (replacing prior options as indicated), the order reception and price calculation section 12, re-calculates the price and activates the display information section 11, to display a summary and give the user or purchaser the option of making additional modifications, ordering additional research or proceeding to place the order(s)(Step 413) -- repeating Step 401 through Step 407 (Step 409).

If the user or purchaser inputs, though the purchaser client 1, that additional legal research orders are desired, the order reception and price calculation section 12, creates additional order space for the user or purchaser in the basket database 13 (Step 410). Step 304 through Step 310 are repeated (Step 411), and Step 401 through 407 are repeated (Step 412), with the user or purchaser again being given the option to make modifications, order additional research or proceeding to place the order(s) (Step 413).

FIG. 5 illustrates the flow of processing steps when a user or purchaser indicates a desire to proceed to place/process the order(s). First, the display information section 11, utilizing the file search section 19, searches the WWW pages database 20 and creates and displays screen pages asking the user or purchase to provide full name, address, telephone number, email address and credit card or account payment information (Step 501). Utilizing the purchaser client 1, the user or purchaser inputs the requested data, which is stored by the display information section 11, in the basket database (Step 502). Next, the display information section 11, activates the settlement processing section 14, which receives the client ID from the display information section (Step 503). Using the received client ID, the settlement processing section 14, utilizing the file search section 19, searches the basket database for order information stored for the user or purchaser (Step 504). Based upon this information, the settlement processing 14, utilizing an Internet server/CGI 21, requests the settlement organization 4 (or a legal research provider 3, in cases of accounts maintained by a legal research provider), to authorize a settlement (Step 505). As this is not different from the typical electronic commerce settlement authorization, a detailed description is not provided.

When the settlement processing section 14, receives authorization of the ability (or inability) to complete the settlement from the settlement organization 4, and/or legal research provider 3, it transfers this information to a display information section 11, which displays it to a purchaser client 1,

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and requests final authorization to complete the order (Step 506). If the user or purchaser inputs a desire to complete the transaction, the display information section 11, receives this information, stores it in the basket database 13, and activates the final order processing section 15, which submits the order to the settlement organization 4 (or legal research provider 3), for final settlement (Step 507).

The final order processing section 15, receives confirmation of final settlement and, utilizing the file search section 19, searches the basket database 13, and obtains all information related to the order, including the user or client information, a summary of all selected legal research instruction and specification options, a summary of all selected delivery time and means options, the legal issue to be researched, the final price for each legal research project ordered, and the total final price for all legal research projects ordered. The final order processing section 15, stores all order data and settlement data in an orders database 16, and notifies the legal research provider 3 that an order has been received and/or transfers this information directly to the legal research provider 3, through the Internet Server/CGI for further handling (Step 508).

Although the invention has been described with reference to a particular arrangement of parts, features and the like, these are not intended to exhaust all possible arrangements, and indeed many other modifications and variations will be ascertainable to those of skill in the art.